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SUBJECT: DHAKA POL/ECON COUNSELOR DUNDAS MCCULLOUGH INTERACTS WITH
INDIAN OFFICIALS IN CALCUTTA

11. (U) Summary: On October 5, Embassy Dhaka Pol/Econ Counselor Dundas McCullough visited Calcutta to assess Indian perspectives on security and infiltration of terrorists from Bangladesh into India and for an overview of India's economic relationship with Bangladesh. The prevailing sentiment in meetings with Indian interlocutors was that cooperation and information sharing between the GOI and GOB on security matters is negligible at best, even though infiltration was on the rise. Foreign diplomats and private sector representatives cited a lack of trust between the two governments as the primary barrier to improving economic relations. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Dhaka Pol/Econ Counselor, Calcutta CG, and Calcutta Poloff met with Government of West Bengal (GOWB) Home Secretary P.R. Ray. Ray identified illegal migration from Bangladesh as a historical problem with possible growing links to terrorism, and cited the failure of GOB officials to recognize and act upon shared GOI intelligence as a major stumbling block for bilateral cooperation on matters of security. Ray acknowledged that India itself had "only just woken up to the true gravity of the situation," and that there had been scant progress on properly identifying immigrants, either through an ID card system or land records. In addition, obtaining "actionable intelligence" was generally proving difficult. However, Ray claimed that the GOI had plenty of evidence that insurgent groups were training in Bangladesh and had provided the GOB with the same, with no result. (Note: This theme was a recurring one, with Indian interlocutors stressing that the GOI had provided the GOB with lists with names and addresses of terrorists taking refuge in Bangladesh, but that the GOB had not followed up. When we asked for a copy of the lists, we were referred to New Delhi. End note.)

13. (SBU) Coming out of recent Home Secretaries meetings in Dhaka, Ray was not optimistic that there would be much improvement of bilateral relations in the near future. Ray opined that the Bangladeshi attitude on issues such as extradition and consular access rights in fact had hardened in the past two years. This lack of cooperation was apparent in the ongoing Indian effort to establish a border fence between the two nations. Repatriation was a difficult task, with Bangladesh authorities being unwilling to accept those being "pushed back" by India's Border Security Forces (BSF). Ray felt there was little interest from the Central Indian government to tackle the problem of determining migrants' citizenship and identity, but it was also because many Bangladeshis had taken up

residence in major Indian cities and were contributing to the economy that the political will was lacking.

¶4. (SBU) The Deputy Inspector General of Police - (Criminal Investigation Department) Soumen Mitra shared Ray's view that the 4,095-kilometer border between India and Bangladesh is too "porous." Mitra felt that given the ease with which banned or suspected terrorist organizations could change their names, it was probable that some had already set up operations in W. Bengal. To curb criminal activities in India and border-states, Mitra highlighted the need for an extradition treaty between India and Bangladesh, but acknowledged that little was being done to make this a reality. He also added that smuggling of arms through Burma and the Chittagong hill tracts to criminals and insurgents in Northeast India was a persistent problem. When asked about the growing number of madrassas in W. Bengal's border areas, Mitra identified the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, as the madrassas' primary source of funding.

¶5. (SBU) While West Bengal's State Congress Party General Secretary Dr. Nuruzzaman (Note: the Congress party is a member

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of the opposition in West Bengal, and Dr. Nuruzzaman is a Muslim) shared the view that Indian states near the Bangladesh border have become more vulnerable since the creation of Bangladesh, he believed that all madrassas at the border areas should not be treated as terrorist training grounds. He was aware that the madrassas received money from abroad, but believed that is was mainly for their own infrastructure development. Nurazzaman also blamed the BSF for not doing enough if there really as a problem with infiltrations. Commenting on the upcoming Bangladesh elections, he said, "We all know that Jamat-e-Islami, which is supporting the present Khaleda Zia government, is a fundamentalist party. We have no problems with Sheikh Hasina Wajed's Awami League."

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¶6. (U) In later meetings with academics, businessmen, and diplomats, views on the Indo-Bangladesh relationship remained negative. The Bangladeshi Deputy High Commissioner (BDHC) and Nepali Deputy Consul General pointed out the extreme trade imbalance between their countries and India, and explained that there was little they could do about increasing Indian cooperation. Non-tariff barriers at the border effectively slowed trade, and there was little sign that India was prepared to make a serious effort to reduce onerous bureaucratic requirements on goods coming into India. Dialogue to address these concerns was non-existent. "The trust just isn't there," said the BDHC.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: With the media highlighting suspected terrorists' use of Bangladesh as an entry point into India to carry out the July 11 Mumbai bombings, Indian suspicion about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh is steadily increasing. With Bangladesh's national election set for January 2007, Dhaka Pol/Econ counselor repeatedly stressed that the U.S. saw the formation of a new government, regardless of who wins the election, as a target of opportunity for closer cooperation on security issues. If the recent meetings were any indication, however, the GOI and local law enforcement have yet to decide if and how India could join in that effort.

¶8. (U) This message was cleared by Pol/Econ Counselor McCullough.
JARDINE